

Message Text

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TOPOL 5

FOLLOWING SENT ACTION SECSTATE INFO ANKARA ATHENS BERLIN BONN
BRUSSELS COPENHAGEN THE HAGUE LISBON LUXEMBOURG OSLO OTTAWA
ROME PARIS REYKJAVIK NATO CINCLANT COMICEDEFOR USUN USNMR
FROM LONDON OCT 2

QUOTE

C O N F I D E N T I A L LONDON 11306

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PBOR, IC, UK

SUBJECT: UK-ICELAND FISHING DISPUTE: POLITICAL CON-
STRAINTS

REF: FLOYD-JAMES TELCON SEPTEMBER 26

SUMMARY. BRITISH POLITICAL LEADERS AND OFFICIALS
DEALING WITH ICELANDIC FISHERIES DISPUTE HAVE PERIODICAL-
LY REFERRED TO DOMESTIC POLITICAL CONSTRAINTS WHICH LIMIT
GOVERNMENT'S FREEDOM OF ACTION. EMBASSY CONSIDERS THESE
CONSTRAINTS TO BE REAL AND DOUBTS THAT BRITISH GOVERN-
MENT CAN EITHER IGNORE THEM OR DEPART VERY FAR FROM
EXISTING LINES OF POLICY. END SUMMARY.

1. IN RESPONSE TO REQUEST OF EUR/NE WE OFFER FOLLOWING
ANALYSIS OF DOMESTIC POLITICAL FACTORS INVOLVED IN
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BRITISH DISPUTE WITH ICELAND OVER FISHERIES. BRITISH
POSITION ON FISHERIES DISPUTE HAS COME A LONG WAY SINCE
ICELAND FIRST ANNOUNCED ITS INTENTION TO EXTEND EXCLUSIVE
FISHERIES JURISDICTION TO 50 MILES. IN PAST TWO YEARS

BRITISH HAVE SHOWN WILLINGNESS TO MAKE CONCESSIONS IN VIRTUALLY ALL AREAS OF INTEREST TO ICELAND; BUT THEY ARE UNWILLING TO ADMIT LEGALITY OF ICELANDIC CLAIMS TO EXCLUSIVE RIGHTS OR TO ENTER AN AGREEMENT WHICH WOULD RESULT IN PHASING OUT BRITISH LONG DISTANCE FISHING IN DISPUTED WATERS. FURTHER, PENDING SOME NEGOTIATED SETTLEMENT, GOVERNMENT IS UNDER STRONG PRESSURE TO PROVIDE A CERTAIN MINIMUM OF PROTECTION FOR BRITISH TRAWLERS.

2. THOUGH ECONOMIC FACTORS DETERMINING THIS POLICY ARE PERHAPS LESS COMPELLING THAN POLITICAL-SOCIAL ONES, THEY ARE NEVERTHELESS SUBSTANTIAL. BRITISH ICELANDIC FISH CATCH IS WORTH ABOUT 13 MILLION POUNDS (CA \$33) PER YEAR, WHICH IS ABOUT HALF OF UK'S DISTANT WATER DEMERSAL FISH LANDINGS AND 20 PERCENT OF ALL FISH LANDED BY BRITISH FISHING VESSELS. MOST OF 190-ODD TRAWLERS ENGAGED IN ICELANDIC FISHING ARE BASED IN OR NEAR PORTS OF HULL AND GRIMSBY. THE MAJOR COST OF CONCESSIONS ALREADY OFFERED BY BRITISH WILL BE BORNE BY THESE COMMUNITIES AND TO A LESSER EXTENT ALSO BY BRITISH CONSUMER PAYING MORE FOR SUBSTITUTE FISH IMPORTS. ACCEDING TO REYKJAVIC'S DEMANDS FOR A PHASE OUT OF BRITISH FISHING IN ICELANDIC WATERS WOULD VIRTUALLY DESTROY THE LIFE OF THESE PORTS, ACCORDING TO A GOVERNMENT WHITE PAPER ON THE SUBJECT. THERE ARE, OF COURSE, OTHER COSTS RESULTING FROM THE PRESENT SITUATION, I.E., COSTS OF NAVAL ESCORTS, INEFFICIENT TRAWLING OPERATIONS W/ REPLACING CUT TRAWLS, ETC. BUT WHILE THIS IS UNSATISFACTORY, DANGEROUS AND COSTLY FOR BRITISH GOVERNMENT AND TRAWLING INDUSTRY, IT HAS SEEMED CLEARLY PREFERABLE TO ALTERNATIVE OF PHASING OUT FISHING OPERATIONS ALTOGETHER.

3. TRAWLING INDUSTRY REPRESENTATIVES HAVE KEPT CLOSE CONTACT WITH GOVERNMENT POLICY MAKERS THROUGHOUT THIS DIFFICULT PERIOD. THEY HAVE COOPERATED WITH THE GOVERNMENT IN TRYING TO AVOID INFLAMMATORY INCIDENTS, ASSURING CONFIDENTIAL

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TRAWLER CAPTAIN COMPLIANCE WITH GOVERNMENT CONTROLS AND POLICY, ETC. IN RETURN FOR PLAYING A CONSTRUCTIVE ROLE, THEY FULLY EXPECT GOVERNMENT TO PROTECT THEIR VITAL LONG-TERM INTERESTS AND GOVERNMENT COULD ONLY FAIL TO DO SO AT A SIGNIFICANT COST.

4. ON POLITICAL SIDE, THE BRITISH PUBLIC HAS BEEN GENERALLY SYMPATHETIC TO ICELAND'S CONCERNS AND RECOGNIZES ITS MUCH GREATER DEPENDENCE ON FISHING. NEVERTHELESS, POLITICIANS, THE PRESS AND MOST BRITISH WE HAVE SPOKEN TO ARE CONVINCED OF CORRECTNESS OF THEIR POSITION IN DISPUTE, BOTH IN LAW AND EQUITY. THEY CONSIDER HMG'S ATTEMPTS TO ACHIEVE A NEGOTIATED SETTLEMENT TO HAVE BEEN RESTRAINED AND FAIR

AND, THOUGH LEARY OF DAVIE AND GOLIATH-TYPE ACCUSATIONS, BELIEVE IT IS GOVERNMENT'S DUTY TO PROTECT BRITISH FISHERMEN AND NATIONAL ECONOMIC INTERESTS IN THESE CIRCUMSTANCES.

5. HEATH GOVERNMENT HAS ALSO BEEN VERY SENSITIVE TO CHARGES THAT IT MIGHT BE INDIFFERENT TO PROTECTING BRITISH INTERESTS, PARTICULARLY DURING PERIOD OF INTEGRATION INTO EUROPEAN COMMUNITY WHEN IT IS WIDELY BELIEVED THAT BRITAIN HAS MADE MORE ECONOMIC SACRIFICES THAN ARE WARRANTED BY BENEFITS SHE IS GETTING IN RETURN. SUCH FEELINGS ARE OFTEN DEEP AND CUT ACROSS PARTY LINES. IT IS NOT SURPRISING, THEREFORE, THAT GOVERNMENT'S POLICY OF SEEKING ACCOMMODATION WITH ICELAND, ITS WILLINGNESS TO CONSIDER VERY DRASTIC REDUCTIONS IN TOTAL BRITISH CATCH AND ITS VERY DELAYED RESPONSE TO ICELANDIC HARASSMENT OF BRITISH TRAWLERS PRIOR TO MAY 1973, WAS STRONGLY CRITICIZED BY MEMBERS OF BOTH PARTIES WHO FELT BRITISH NATIONAL INTERESTS AND PRESTIGE REQUIRED A FIRMER RESPONSE.

6. ANY TENDENCY LABOR OPPOSITION MIGHT HAVE HAD TO TAKE A SOFTER LINE THAN GOVERNMENT WITH LEFT-CENTER GOVERNMENT IN ICELAND WOULD HAVE BEEN MOST VIGOROUSLY OPPOSED WITHIN LABOR PARTY. NOT ONLY ARE HULL AND GRIMSBY REPRESENTED BY LABOR MP'S, BUT OTHER PERMANENT PARTY OFFICIALS HAVE STRONG AND PUBLICLY EXPRESSED VIEWS ON SUBJECT (E.G., CROSSLAND, CALLAGHAN). IN FACT, LP IS THOROUGHLY COMMITTED TO PRESERVING BRITISH FISHING INTERESTS AND THE PARLIAMENTARY RECORD REFLECTS EXPRESSIONS OF CONCERN BY CONFIDENTIAL

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SPOKESMEN OF BOTH PARTIES THAT GOVERNMENT NOT YIELD TO PRESSURE WHICH WOULD LEAVE BRITISH FISHERMEN UNPROTECTED OR UNDERMINE FISHING INDUSTRY. BRITISH ALSO ARE CONVINCED THAT ICELANDIC NEGOTIATORS HAVE ACTED IN BAD FAITH AND MP'S OF BOTH PARTIES ALLUDE TO WRECKING ACTIONS OF FISHING MINISTER JOSEFSSON. THUS, DESPITE SEVEREST MISGIVINGS ABOUT USING FINAL RESORT OF NAVAL PROTECTION FOR ITS TRAWLERS IN MAY, BRITISH GOVERNMENT PROBABLY FELT IT HAD LITTLE, IF ANY, ROOM FOR MANEUVER.

7. IN INTERVAL, BRITISH OPINION HAS NOT SOFTENED.

8. AS A RESULT OF WIDELY PUBLICIZED ICELANDIC STATEMENTS QUESTIONING CONTINUED MEMBERSHIP IN ALLIANCE, AND COLLATERALLY RETENTION OF IDF, INFORMED BRITISH PUBLIC AND OFFICIAL OPINION IS KEENLY CONSCIOUS OF RELATIONSHIP OF FISHING DISPUTE TO LARGER ATLANTIC SECURITY ISSUE. THERE ARE WITHIN BOTH PARTIES ELEMENTS THAT CONSIDER PRESENT GOVERNMENT POLICY EITHER UNWISE FROM A SECURITY VIEWPOINT, TOO COSTLY GIVEN THE STAKES OR SIMPLY UNFAIR TO THE ICELANDERS. FURTHER, BOTH BRITISH GOVERNMENT AND INDUSTRY ARE AWARE THAT 1974 LOS CONFERENCE DECISIONS COULD RESULT, AT LEAST IN LONG RUN, IN REQUIRING MAJOR REORIENTATION OF BRITISH FISHING INDUSTRY. TOGETHER

THESE FACTORS HAVE PREDISPOSED GOVERNMENT TO TRY HARD TO
KEEP DIALOGUE WITH ICELAND GOING AND TO WORK OUT SOME
COMPROMISE. GOVERNMENT'S PRESENT EFFORTS TO AVOID
DIPLOMATIC BREAK CAN CERTAINLY BE SEEN IN THIS LIGHT.
BUT MOST BRITISH HAVE COME TO CONSIDER ICELANDIC POSITION
SO UNREASONABLE AND THEIR ACTIONS SO AFFRONTING, THAT
WE SEE LITTLE LIKELIHOOD THAT HMG COULD MAKE MAJOR NEW
CONCESSIONS ON ISSUE WITHOUT BEING ABLE TO ASSURE PUBLIC
AND FISHING INDUSTRY THAT IT COULD LEAD TO AN INTER-
IM SOLUTION GUARANTEEING BRITISH INTERESTS.

ANNENBERG
UNQUOTE KISSINGER

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